Capitol Punishment . . .

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By Art Buchwald

In GM's Defense

AS ONE who is always looking for lost causes, I think it's about time somebody came to the defense of General Motors. This poor struggling company is being picked on, and harassed, by a Senate investigating committee. Why? Because GM had innocently hired a detective agency to look into the private life of a Senate witness who had written a book attacking the safety of one line of its cars.

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Not only has this caused the company sorrow and anguish, but it is a direct threat to our free enterprise system.

If an organization, with nothing but the highest motives, can be criticized for inquiring into the sex life and private habits of an individual who wrote a book about it, then we are much farther on the road to a police state than anyone thinks.

LET US LOOK at all the facts. A Mr. Ralph Nader wrote a book titled "Unsafe At Any Speed," which pointed up the safety hazards in modern automobiles because of structural defects.

This was a very un-American thing to do because, as a former Secretary of Defense once said, "What's good for General Motors is good for the country." There fore, when Mr. Nader attacked General Motors he was attacking the country.

General Motors had no choice but to find out what kind of man Mr. Nader was. The only way they could do that was to hire a reputable private detective agency.

This agency was instructed to look into Mr. Nader's sex habits on the valid theory that anyone who does not like General Motors' products must be weird.

They could not find anything bad about Mr. Nader's sex life, which only shows you what a sneaky guy he is.

WHEN THEY struck out in that department, the detectives did the only honorable thing. They had him tailed.

Sen. Robert F. Kennedy as well as others on the committee were incensed about this, but how can you have a healthy and growing economy if you don't follow people around.

The problems raised in this particular situation go much more deeply than whether our cars are safe or not. We must be concerned with protecting all corporations that are attacked by individuals. We can not allow people, like Mr. Nader, to invade the privacy of General Motors.

THE SENATE subcommittee hearings have proved, if nothing else, that laws are needed to protect our large corporations.

For a start, there should be a law that anyone who writes a book about a company must reveal his sex habits on the back cover.

Legislation must be passed to keep witnesses from testifying against automobile manufacturers.

Presidents of corporations must be spared the embarrassment of having to publicly apologize for doing what is a commonly accepted practice in industry.

The saddest sight I think I'll ever see is when the General Motors President James M. Roche had to sit in front of a Senate committee, with his counsel Ted Sorensen at his side, and read a statement asking Mr. Nader's forgiveness for what General Motors had done to him.

It was a heartbreaking moment for all of us who believe in the underdog, and who feel that GM got the raw end of the deal.

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